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ABSTRACT

The overall assessment of teacher education students by means of testing may not be the best indicator of competence in a professional field. Assessors must possess both valid and reliable ways of discerning which students have the necessary skills to be effective in the classroom. Portfolio analysis is one way to get better, more valid data about teacher education majors and to focus on skills and behaviors that are most important to the development of quality teachers. This paper defines portfolios and how they enrich assessment, offers guidelines and examples for the use of portfolios, highlights some major problems, and reports results from teacher education majors who have used portfolios. A portfolio is defined as a method of exhibiting a person's learning over time, making a broad-based rather than a narrow evaluation, and using a variety of data sources and methods for data collection. The document concludes with implications for teacher education, suggesting that evaluations be authentic rather than artificial and narrow, include a variety of measures rather than single scores, be kept longitudinally, evidence a sense of striving to improve upon past efforts, and be developmental rather than summative. An appendix provides examples from education majors' practicum portfolios. (LL)

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PORTFOLIO ANALYSIS: WINDOWS OF COMPETENCE

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PORTFOLIO ANALYSIS: WINDOWS OF COMPETENCE

I. INTRODUCTION

There is a persistent problem in the field of Teacher Education that is becoming critical, perhaps, even to our survival. It is testing! Those of us on the front line, evaluating students on a daily basis, know the need to test, especially when we must deal with large numbers of students. But many of us know all too well that tests may give us nice numbers with which to categorize students, but that the numbers may not be the best indicators of student competence. Indeed, the numbers we get often focus attention on behaviors and goals that are not the most significant. It is time that we change how we evaluate students throughout the whole educational enterprise! This paper purports that portfolio analysis is one significant way to 1) get better, more valid data about Teacher Education majors, and 2) focus on skills and behaviors that are more important to the development of quality teachers. The result will be an enterprise more clearly focused on creativity, higher order intellectual skills, moral integrity, and human endeavors (rather than bureaucratic checklists). This paper will clarify the problem of assessment in Teacher Education, define portfolios and how they enrich assessment, offer suggestions for the use of portfolios, highlight some major pitfalls, and report results from Teacher Education majors who have used portfolios.

II. TESTING: A TIME FOR CHANGED EMPHASIS

The overall assessment of students by means of testing is dangerous business in a professional field like Teacher Education, because we, who are the assessors, must possess both valid and reliable ways of measuring which students have the necessary skills to be effective in the classroom. Testing is dangerous because from the results of our tests we determine which teachers possess sufficient knowledge(declarative) which we take to mean that the "passer" is a capable teacher. Teachers, in fact, as part of society's intelligentsia must have a great deal of knowledge. This knowledge can be adequately assessed by testing, which is obvious by the importance we attach to scores from ETS on the National Teachers Examination. Moreover, teachers in many states must make a passing score on this examination before they can obtain their certification. The manner in which these scores are used would indicate that assessors are making a summative judgment that those people who achieve a high enough score, not only had sufficient learning experiences, but have retained enough usable knowledge to be teachers in our society.

Does this mean that passage of this examination indicates that those who pass have the necessary skills to be effective classroom teachers? I know of no one who would answer this question with a yes. Instead we rely on "Student Teaching" as an indicator the preservice teachers have the necessary procedural knowledge to complement the declarative knowledge assessed on the NTE. Unfortunately, too many of us use some type of checklist of practices, not a robust indicator of quality teaching. This checklist may indicate that the "observee" possesses the ability to "do" something, but not that they are capable of any significant procedural knowledge that results in student growth. Many principals in South Carolina, in fact, have remarked to me that our state instrument which is

used to assess the procedural knowledge of beginning teachers is ineffective in determining the best teachers, since some who make less than perfect scores have better lessons than those with the highest scores! In other words, a checklist is not a rich source of information about how well a lesson is taught. Because the field of Education needs more effective ways of assessing procedural knowledge many alternative methods are being and have been explored, such as, case studies, reflective teaching, portfolios, effective teaching competencies, micro teaching, and others. At present portfolio analysis is the most comprehensive method to help professionals make more valid and reliable judgments about a student's procedural (and declarative) knowledge.

Unfortunately, few outside of the art and English fields know much about or use portfolios. An example of this lack of knowledge was evidenced in my classroom. Students in my Education 443 class, "Instructional Theory and Practice in the Elementary School," were asked about portfolios and their use. Of 42 students 27 knew nothing about portfolios! 10 knew vaguely what they were and only 5 knew more than the most rudimentary ideas about them. Even though Portfolio Analysis would offer a more valid measure of what teachers actually do in the classroom, few of those beginning to teach appear to know much about portfolios and, hence, the present lack of acceptance may result from lack of knowledge. However, in contrast 25 of my students disliked the present way in which they were assessed, because it was measuring tiny facts, was not comprehensive enough, or did not assess what they had learned. Therefore, if we are to use portfolios in developing teachers' best skills, we must introduce this method and give students experiences with it. In doing so we can, moreover, use data that will allow us to measure what our students are actually learning in the classroom and on their own, applying what we have taught them.

III. PORTFOLIOS

What is a portfolio? In this paper a portfolio is defined as a method of exhibiting a person's learning over time, making a broad-based rather than a narrow evaluation, and in using a variety of data sources and methods of collecting data. It includes qualitative as well as quantitative data. Therefore, narrative judgments, such as, how well a lesson was done, are acceptable, as are reflections by others or even the individual being judged. Moreover, not only can test scores or checklists be used, but they are encouraged, because they add to the overall picture of complex, real life setting of the practicum experience, which is much more than a single score. Whereas, much of the evaluation current throughout education from elementary school to college reduces learning experiences to a single score or grade, portfolios display a student's work comprehensively. For purposes of reporting student progress to parents, portfolios can be evaluated with a single grade, however, the intention of most of those who use portfolios is that portfolios should be seen as a RANGE of many real and varied experiences that make-up a true to life, complex evaluation, not a single, contrived grade. The purpose in using portfolios must be to display a BREADTH of reality instead of its SUM, a true to life three dimensional landscape rather than a one dimensional title of a picture.

Yet, if this were the extent of the use of portfolios, their power would not be so obvious. Portfolios can be used to certify that experiences which appear simple, or even seem insignificant, are in reality so varied and perhaps so valuable that several research or evaluation tools must be used to adequately evaluate the totality of the experience. Moreover, they allow students to present a more authentic portrayal of what they have actually achieved through the experiences of teaching in the classroom milieu. For example, the following is just a brief list

(see Goodman, 1989, p.128) of possible behaviors, or thinking, for Preservice Teachers to exhibit in a portfolio:

1) a reflective analysis of a practicum lesson as a sophomore;
2) a reflective analysis of a practicum lesson as a senior;
3) a comparison of personal growth as a teacher from 1 to 2 above;
4) a theory of classroom management;
5) a personal philosophy of your classroom; i.e., your goals for students;
6) a personal journal
7) insights into real lives (see Robert Coles, 1989)
8) an anecdote with humor or a paradox about classroom lives
9) a poem about a classroom experience
10) an observation of another teacher
11) an analysis of personal confusion about a topic
12) a choice of the most significant event in a practicum

For those who want to use portfolios in a another sense, as a single grade, other methods are better and less time consuming. Portfolios may be used by those who want to:

1) admit that lasting significance rarely lies in a single work or experience,
2) proclaim that an endeavor like education must look beyond simple, low level, basic work and must examine complex, varied levels of work which extend beyond basic knowledge.
3) accept the fact that much of what we do as learners is unfinished, in need of sincere criticism, and ready, not to be published but be refined;

4) celebrate excellence by challenging and requesting authentic striving; and

5) observe competence over a period of time.

IV. GUIDELINES FOR USING PORTFOLIOS

A. Establish a purpose or goal for using the portfolio;(see Tierney et al, 1991)

B. Discuss this purpose with students, because beginning efforts are often off target;

C. Set the portfolio requirements with students, or with their input;

D. Keep in mind the benefits that portfolios offer: variety, breadth, complexity, longitudinal, and experimental;

E. Have students bring in a rough draft to make final adjustments before any evaluations takes place;

F. Assign an editing group to examine portfolios and make assessments; i.e., give their open opinions of overall quality, again before they are collected and evaluated;

G. Encourage effort, genuineness, originality and creativity;

H. Examine the portfolios and give feedback; consider giving only feedback, no grades;

I. Make broad assessments publicly; i.e., the focus is on the community of writers; save specific feedback for private.

V. EXAMPLES OF PORTFOLIOS

In order to really appreciate the power of portfolios, you must see some first hand. The following(all pseudonyms) have been used in my "Instructional Theory" class, my "Elementary Math Methods" class, or a middle school math class of a colleague.

1. Athena

This student shares insights about a practicum. She shows significant understanding of her previous learning and how she has tried to apply this learning in a classroom.

2. Elisabeth

Candid remarks from a micro lesson show the impact of teacher assessment. Personal feelings often are lost in present methods of assessment.

3. Catherine

Sometimes we forget as professors just what students are going through. For Catherine completing her practicum meant she survived a very scary part of her college career.

4. Daisy

From a math portfolio Daisy shows the results of her imagination in creating a Tangram of her own and the poem that went with it. The answer to the Tangram follows.

5. Eunice

Beauty is one of the characteristics that we all cherish yet seldom encourage. Eunice let her creativity flourish with this beautiful red, white and green collage!

6. Frank

Personal choice and direction is rarely allowed in many courses. Frank followed suggestions from his current professor, past teachers, and personal research to gain significant declarative and procedural knowledge.

7. George

In his journal George described his learning for two weeks. We see he feels ready for testing. In fact he was not! The teacher can help him understand his own thinking better because of the honest description.

VI. PROBLEMS IN USING PORTFOLIOS

Most adults would probably tell to children that if the rewards of doing something are great, it is probably worth doing. This is our plight in education. Portfolios are significant. They take a great deal of calcite to ready our students, and they take a lot of time to great, but the benefits are so significant, they are worth it.

Like essay tests, grading portfolios is tough, the decision making process is fuzzy, sometimes arbitrary. If you trust the evaluator, there will be no problems. Such authentic assessments need to follow genuine classroom interaction, so that students can trust teachers to play fair. Without this interaction, you cannot have the trust students need to accept somewhat nebulous evaluations.

Moreover, strict grading of portfolios for English will kill the dedication some students have to attempt to put significant work in their files. Stay clear of examining the "picky" stuff until the thoughtful part of the portfolio is complete. Indeed, often the best way with which to use portfolios may be to offer pure feedback, no grades. Comments may mean more, be of more help, and further the academic and personal development of a student than a grade.

Finally, a true environment for significant thought and learning develops in a classroom climate that encourages effort, creativity, and originality. Do not force too many requirements on students. Support all student effort until really good things happen; remember, they have not seen the quality of finished products as often as you have.

VII. IMPLICATIONS FOR TEACHER EDUCATION

In closing five key considerations need to be emphasized about assessment. First, evaluations should be authentic rather than artificial and narrow. Grades must come from and resemble real life skills and products rather than imitate the SAT. Second, evaluations should include variety measures not just a single score. Many people are competent writers but not test takers; many of us look good on one measure of ability and poor on another; and, anyone can have a bad day - and fail a test. Next, evaluations should be kept longitudinally rather than frozen in time; the need to report "scores" for a single grading period should not prevent teachers from examining other salient "times". Truer evaluations of students can be made by detailing what happens over time than by what happened in November or June on their report cards. In real life a moment in a person's life is rarely isolated from what goes before and after. Fourth, evaluation should emphasize striving to better past efforts, to aim for excellence rather than accepting

mediocrity. Expectations often get lost when using grades, not as likely when using portfolios. Lastly, evaluations should be developmental rather than summative. Improvements can be documented and fit into a philosophy of human development rather than a one time judgment: a person is good in mathematics or poor does not allow for improvement . These five concepts treat assessment as part of life rather than as part of the assembly line. It is my belief that our students deserve this kind of respect!

Teacher Education, like so many professions today, is searching for significant improvements. Many and varied changes have been made, yet one of the most basic aspects of our craft has changed only superficially until now. Let us proceed on with changes in evaluation, particularly testing. Portfolio analysis is one way to alter this basic process.

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IX. APPENDIX

1. Athena

Overview of Insights

This practicum experience brought the reality of what being a teacher is all about into perspective. I walked into this practicum with an optimistic outlook. It did not take long for me to realize that being a teacher is not all fun and games. Being an effective teacher takes hard work, determination, patience, and a desire to be a teacher. That is just naming a few of the many aspects of being effective. I now have a much clearer understanding of what makes a class work. Classroom management, planning, and instructional methods are a selected few of the many components that make a class function successfully.

Through observing and teaching, I realized that classroom management is the core of a successful class. Rules must be enforced in a consistent manner. There should be an understanding of who is in charge. From my first graders, I quickly realized that you must always be one step ahead of the students. Praise is the key to managing the classroom. One idea I got from my cooperating teacher was to use statements that give praise to the students that are being well behaved. This works much better tha always calling down the students who are misbehaving. The first method shows appreciation towards the well behaved students while it sets a goal for the other students. yes

Planning is an essential part of being an effective teacher. Through teaching the twelve lessons, I saw that

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1. Athena

a well prepared lesson always comes together when it is being taught. I have learned to plan every detail of the lesson so it can be carried out smoothly. Students are turned off by lessons that are in pieces with no consistency. All of my lessons that were well planned turned out great and I had wonderful feedback from my students. Much thought should be put into each lesson to make it appropriate for the students as well as valuable. Planning can make a great difference in the success of a lesson.

I have realized that every teacher should have a variety of instructional methods. Students quickly get tired of the same thing day after day. My first graders learned more when the were active and involved in the lesson. At this age , it is very easy to lose them in a lesson. Some ideas I obtained for this grade level are using visual aids such as posters, models, and big books. Students at this age also love to make books. I observed my class actually enjoying reading their books. I also know that hands on experience is necessary. The key is to keep the child interested in learning.

This practicum has been a wonderful learning experience. I have gained many great ideas that I plan to use in the future. I now know what will make me the kind of teacher that I have always wanted to be.

= You've shown several real insights

2. Elisabeth

TWO MINUTE LESSON

This was my first experience teaching a two minute lesson. I was very intimated when I learned of this assignment and even more so when I was assigned the topic of Evolution. What a broad subject!

To my surprise it was not so painful. I was quite nervous performing in front of my peers but the lesson went smoothly.

I was unaware of the bulk of information that could be communicated in two minutes. I learned how to focus on one objective, relate to prior knowledge, and to include a proper closure.

When I received my grade I was very pleased. The A- boosted my self-esteem along with the comments from my peers. I enjoyed this two minute lesson and learned much from observing the other lessons.

Elisabeth A-

Appropriate statement of objective. Well rehersed & presented. Excellent chart. You involved the class and presented much info.

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3. Catherine

Professional Goals for Practicum

Yes A practicum is difficult. There is no power. The students know that you are not a "real" teacher, so there are no "real" consequences. With this in mind, I have set three personal goals which are: to survive, to observe, and to ask myself "If I were teaching, how would I handle this situation?"

To survive might sound like a trivial goal, but it is a Yes practical one. I am Sumter student, so my day starts at 5 a.m., I have a husband, three teenage children (one in college), and I also coach two swim teams with five practices a week. There were six practices, but I canceled Thursday morning 6 a.m. practice. Surviving this practicum is an important goal for me to achieve.

To observe my practicum teacher in all areas of teaching helps me form my own ideas on teaching. My teacher is an eight year veteran and a 1993 Teacher of the Year. She uses innovative styles and models of teaching, and textbooks as resources only. After several years, she has finally coerced the principal to let her team teach with another teacher who shares some of her ideas. I observe her interaction with her students, the way she handles adversity, and her diverse style in teaching.

If I were teaching, how would I handle this situation? This is a constant way of evaluating not only my practicum teacher, but myself as well. I try to react before she does and see if our reactions are the same. I find myself too caring and helpful to the students. This style is great for K-2, but third graders need to start seeking their autonomy. She is great at this! She will ask the students the necessary questions in order for self

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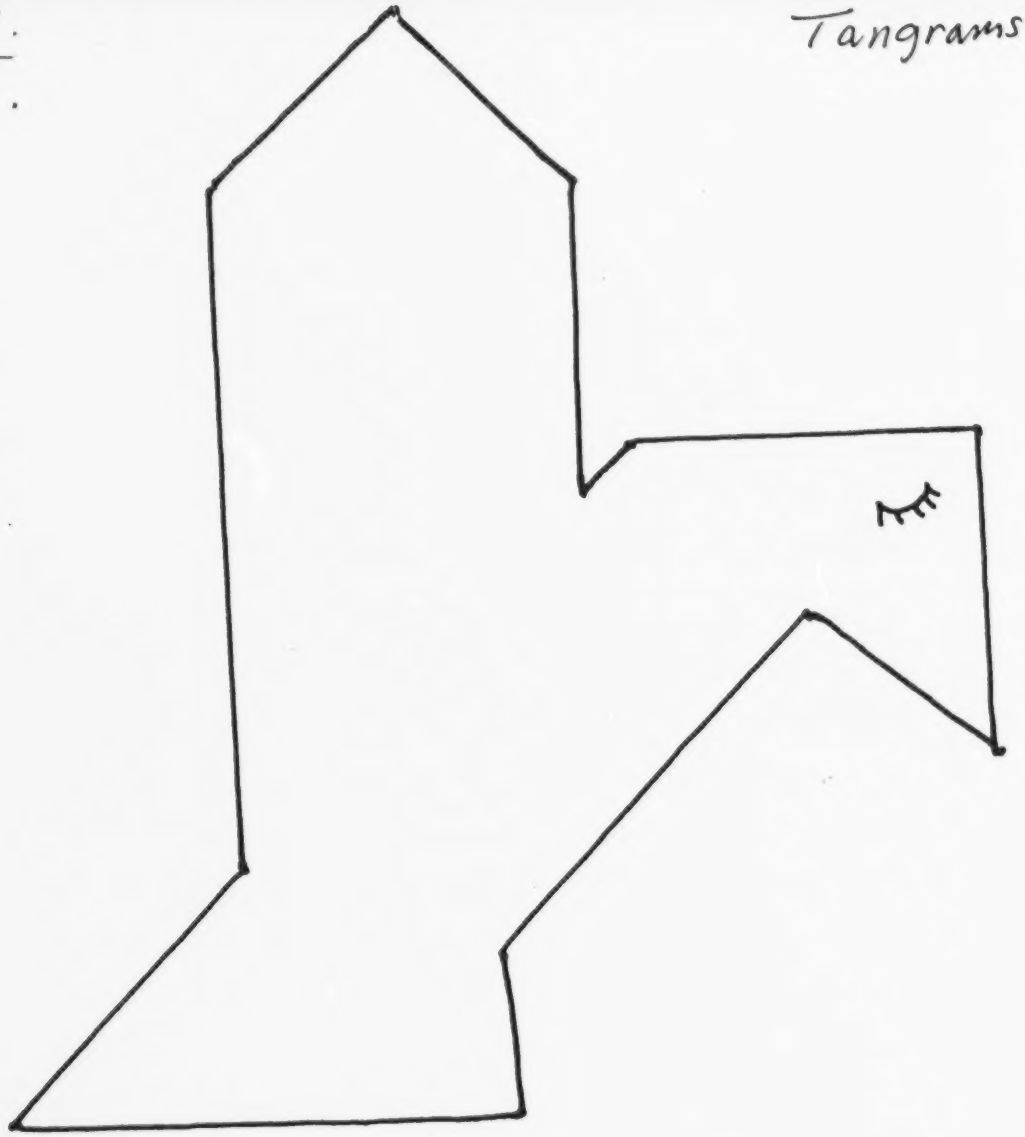
H. Daisy.

Tangrams



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4. Daisy

Once upon a time there was a bird
named DAISY.
All of the other birds thought she was lazy.
She asked them why? then started to cry
only because she couldn't fly.

Now Daisy practiced every Day. But it
seemed that obsticales got in her way.
The snow, the wind, the rain or the cold

sometimes she thought she was just
too old.

One day she looked out her window toward
the sun
And imagined that flying would be so much
fun
SO she walked through the door, to

try it once more and almost screamed
as her feet left the floor.

Now there is a bird Named Daisy.
She's No longer considered lazy.
-She doesn't cry, because she can
fly, and as the story ends
she bids you goodbye!

"GOODBYE"

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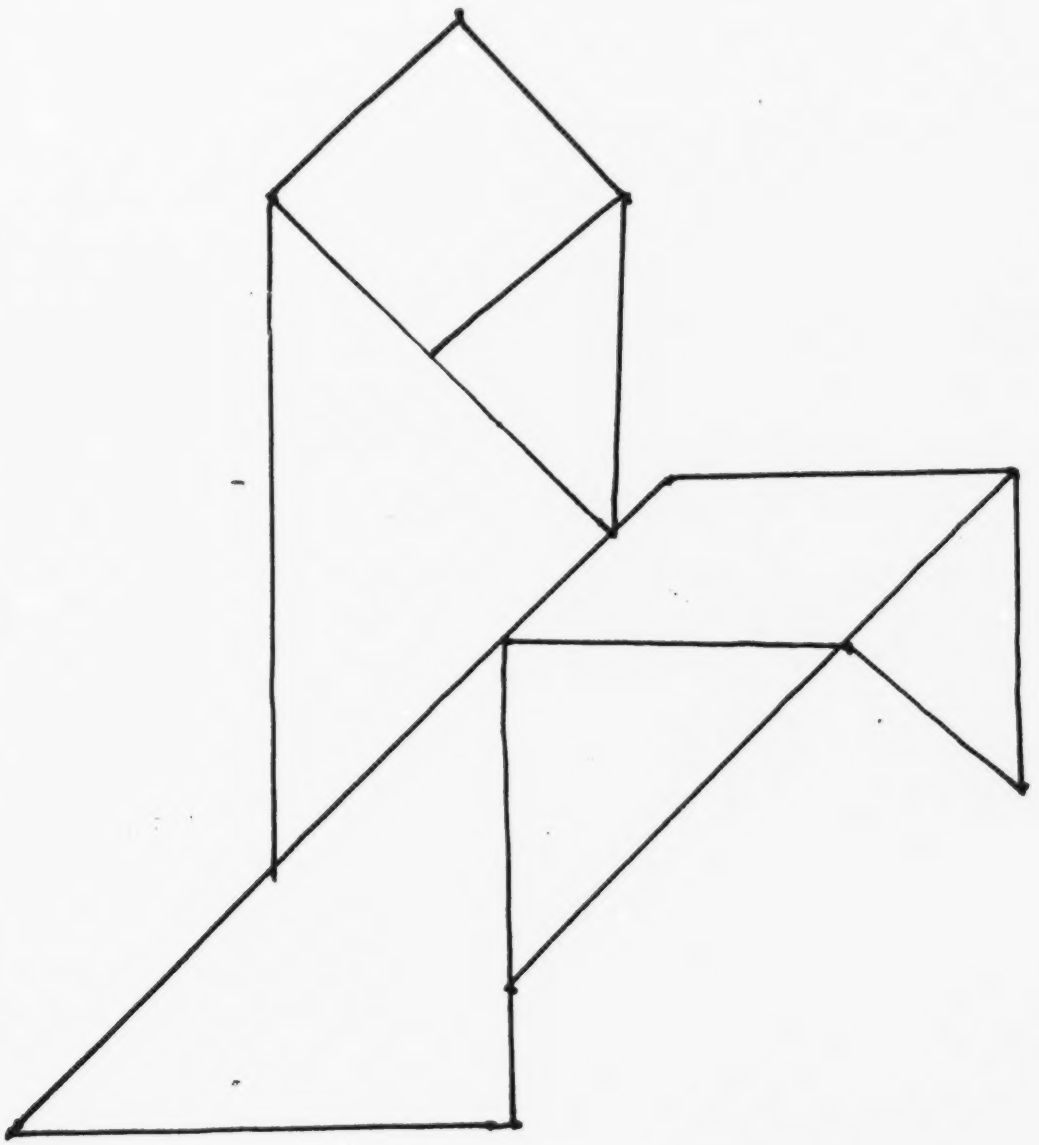
4. Daisy



(Original in red, white & green)

Beautiful

5. Eunice

A TEACHER:

Takes the time to listen and respond
To all of the students no matter what goes on.
Each child is an individual who looks up to
The teacher, the leader, yes this is you.
Acting as a role model, counselor and friend.
Gives the students someone to look up to again and again
Creating a trust with your students should be on the top of your list
Problems and troubles they bring to you must not be dismissed.
Helping each other through good times and bad
Can help teacher and student let a good relationship be had.
Every day is a challenge and you're not always at your best
The students will make it their business to put you to the test.
Remember, becoming a teacher is a gift from above.
It takes patience, trust, respect, and a whole lot of love.

You must love what you do to succeed in this career.
You're a teacher, a leader, so smile from ear to ear.

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Eunice
11-25-92

L. Frank

3. Personal Research

My personal research consisted of: rereading two art ed. texts; reading for the first time two helpful discoveries, Lowenfeld, recommended by Dr. Touzel, and Wachowiak, found in the media library; very casual, brief talks with the art teachers and art ed. instructors here at USC Coastal; and interviews with two art teachers in the community.

My focus was trying to find help to remedy my confusion about the place of motivation and of evaluation in art education.

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J. George

What we did this Week Jan. 13, 93

This week we reviewed chapter one, through fours. Chapters three and four we started. Homework is the easiest of them all. Mrs. Smith is making us study hard because we will be having an exam Thursday. I am ready for the exam.

D.O.M Jan. 28, 93

What I learned this week:

This week I have learned about parallel lines, adjacent and vertical angles. Adjacent angles are complements. The missing angles and parallel lines I can do very easily. This is what I have learned this week.

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